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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDMA #0367 1061158
ZNY CCCCC ZZH ZUI RUEWMCE8064 1061151
R 161158Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC0000
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000367

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PARIS FOR WALLER, LONDON FOR TSOU, PRM/FO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2017
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SUBJECT: UPDATES ON DISPLACED IRAQIS IN SYRIA

REF: DAMASCUS 258

CLASSIFIED BY: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES MICHAEL H. CORBIN FOR
REASONS 1.4 B/D

11. (C) IN THE RUN-UP TO THE APRIL 17-18 "INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON ADDRESSING THE HUMANITARIAN NEEDS OF REFUGEES
AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN IRAQ AND NEIGHBORING
COUNTRIES" IN GENEVA, POST PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING UPDATES
BASED ON AN APRIL 15 CONVERSATION WITH UNHCR'S DAMASCUS
REPRESENTATIVE LAURENS JOLLES:

-- SYRIAN ATTENDANCE AT THE CONFERENCE WILL INCLUDE DEPUTY
FOREIGN MINISTER FAISAL MIKDAD (WHO MET MARCH 12 WITH
VISITING ASSISTANT SECRETARY ELLEN SAUERBREY FOR POPULATION,
REFUGEES AND MIGRATION AS REPORTED IN REFTEL) AND MIKDAD'S
OFFICE DIRECTOR HUSSAM AL-DIN ALA'. THE HEAD OF THE SYRIAN
ARAB RED CRESCENT, ABDUL RAHMAN ATTAR, WILL ALSO ATTEND.

-- COST TO SYRIA: SARG OFFICIALS ARE EXPECTED TO ANNOUNCE AT
THE CONFERENCE THE COST TO SYRIA OF HOSTING THE INFLUX OF
IRAQIS WHO ARE COMMONLY ESTIMATED TO NUMBER BETWEEN 1.3 AND
1.5 MILLION (ALTHOUGH NO ONE REALLY KNOWS THE TRUE NUMBER).
FOR A MONTH, DEPUTY PM FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS ABDULLAH DARDARI
HAS BEEN PUBLICLY QUOTING THE COST TO DATE OF HOSTING THE
IRAQIS AT OVER ONE BILLION USD.

-- NUMBER OF IRAQIS IN SYRIA: UP UNTIL NOW, THERE HAS BEEN
NO PUBLIC RELEASE OF AN UPDATED SURVEY ON THE NUMBER OF
DISPLACED IRAQIS IN SYRIA SINCE THE MARCH 2006 SOCIO-ECONOMIC
JOINT REPORT BY UNHCR, THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM AND UNICEF.
THERE ARE REPORTS THAT THE SYRIAN ARAB RED CRESCENT RECENTLY
COMPLETED AN UPDATED SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY WITH HELP FROM TWO
SCANDINAVIAN ORGANIZATIONS, BUT SO FAR THE REPORT HAS NOT
BEEN PUBLICLY RELEASED AND UNHCR HAS NOT SEEN A COPY. THE
SARG DENIED PERMISSION FOR A PREVIOUSLY PROPOSED
SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY BY THE NORWEGIAN ORGANIZATION FAFO.

-- IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS: USING FUNDS FROM UNHCR'S 2007 USD
60 MILLION FLASH APPEAL FOR ASSISTANCE TO IRAQIS IN THE
REGION, UNHCR HAS CONCLUDED AGREEMENTS WITH THE SYRIAN
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (USD 3.8 MILLION); THE SYRIAN ARAB RED
CRESCENT; THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE FOR SYRIA'S NORTHEASTERN
HASSAKE PROVINCE (USD 655,000); CARITAS (USD 94,000); IBRAHIM
KHALIL (USD 94,000); BON PASTEUR (USD 94,000); THE
PALESTINIAN RED CROSS (152,000); AND THE EVANGELICAL CHRIST
IN ALLIANCE CHURCH (USD 196,000). STILL PENDING ARE
AGREEMENTS WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH (USD 2 MILLION) AND
THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION (USD 47,000).

-- NGOS: THE SYRIAN MFA HAS INDICATED TO UNHCR IT WILL

SUPPORT THE PRESENCE IN SYRIA OF NON-POLITICAL,
NON-RELIGIOUS, NON-CONTROVERSIAL INTERNATIONAL NGOS IN SYRIA,
WHICH WOULD NOT BE LICENSED BUT WOULD INSTEAD WORK UNDER THE
AEGIS OF THE SYRIAN ARAB RED CRESCENT. SUCH NGOS INCLUDE THE
DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL AND THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE.

-- RESETTLEMENT: SYRIAN MFA SPOKESWOMAN BUSHRA KANAFANI
RECENTLY VOICED CONCERN TO UNHCR ABOUT THE SARG'S FEAR THAT
THE IRAQIS REFERRED FOR THIRD-COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT WOULD BE
AMONG THE MOST EDUCATED, CREATING A "BRAINDRAIN" THAT WOULD
HINDER THE REBUILDING OF IRAQ. (NOTE: MIKDAD VOICED A SARG
CONCERN TO SAUERBREY DURING HER MARCH 12 VISIT THAT THE USG
WAS ONLY INTERESTED IN ACCEPTING FOR RESETTLEMENT THOSE
IRAQIS WHO HAD WORKED WITH THE USG IN IRAQ. END NOTE.)

-- DEPORTATIONS: UNHCR HAS NO INDICATIONS THAT THE SARG IS
DEPORTING IRAQIS WHO HAVE OVERSTAYED THEIR VISAS HERE. UNHCR
HAS SET UP HOTLINES FOR BY WHICH IRAQIS CAN REPORT LEGAL
PROBLEMS, BUT SO FAR IT HAS BEEN ABLE TO RESOLVE ALL
OUTSTANDING VISA ISSUES. CURRENTLY, NEW IRAQI ARRIVALS ARE
GIVEN A ONE-MONTH ENTRY VISA, WHICH THEY CAN EXTEND TO THREE
MONTHS AT THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR'S IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT.
THE THREE-MONTH VISA CAN BE EXTENDED WITHIN SYRIA FOR ANOTHER
THREE MONTHS. AFTER THE SIX MONTHS IS EXHAUSTED, IRAQIS MUST
DEPART--ALTHOUGH THERE IS AT PRESENT NO WAITING PERIOD
PREVENTING THEIR IMMEDIATE RETURN--AND REENTER SYRIA UPON
WHICH THE PROCESS BEGINS AGAIN.
CORBIN